

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Americus Hotel

and or common Americus Hotel

2. Location

street & number 541 Hamilton Street not for publication

city, town Allentown vicinity of

state PA code 42 county Lehigh code

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name International Hotel Developers, Ltd.

street & number 6th and Hamilton Streets

city, town Allentown vicinity of state PA

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Lehigh County Courthouse

street & number 5th and Hamilton Streets

city, town Allentown state PA

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	N/A
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

At the intersection of Sixth and Hamilton Streets, one block from Allentown's commercial center at Seventh and Hamilton, is the impressive bulk of the Americus Hotel. Erected at the height of the "Roaring Twenties", the hotel is a manifestation of the expansionist optimism of that post-war decade and describes the ambition of Albert Gomery, president of Allentown's Chamber of Commerce. Unlike the typical four- and five-story Colonial Revival hotels of most small cities, it was Gomery's vision to build in Allentown a lofty and ambitious high-style hotel reminiscent of major metropolitan centers. That was achieved in a building that remains essentially intact three generations later. The building occupies its entire site with the principal corner dominated by a thirteen-story yellow brick tower divided into a base and a piano nobile, surmounted by eleven stories of rooms. The base is given over to shops, which serve both the street and the hotel, and are differentiated from the bulk of the building by being sheathed in unarticulated limestone. Above, the main exchange level of the hotel is accented by oversized arched windows that mark the location of the lobby, lounge and main dining room.

At that level the principal themes of the facade are stated. On the Hamilton Street facade, the central three bays are framed by pilasters that rise through the second story belt courses, continuing to the top of the hotel where they are capped by pier caps. The corner bays are one-story however, establishing the theme of the modern set back skyscraper of New York. The theme of advance and recession is reversed on the side elevation. There the corner bays are slightly advanced, while framing a recessed center which like the Hamilton Street front is articulated at each structural bay by a pilaster. That block reiterates the set back theme, rising the full thirteen stories. Balconies at the upper levels and round-arched windows in the corner bays complete the principal compositional themes.

If from the street the main block of the building relates to conventional 1920s architectural forms, its detail relates to equally contemporary interest in historic brick architecture of tall buildings from the Lombard Romanesque and the Spanish Baroque. Those styles were only then being rediscovered by historians and architects; here the style was selected to represent the Italo/Iberian theme which was intended to recall both Amerigo Vespucci and his Spanish sponsors. On the other hand, the second story of the building, while appearing to be a cubic mass from the street, in fact becomes L-shaped, with an internal court lighting the interior bedrooms. The exterior remains essentially intact, having only been altered on the basement, or shop level. The corner bay has been infilled for a restaurant, and the canopies at the entrance have been simplified in 1960s fashion.

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The interior is approached through entrances from the two major street fronts. The principal door opens from Hamilton Street, and proceeds through a narrow corridor to a short flight of stairs that rises to the lobby level. The ceiling above the stair is treated as a monumental, coffered barrel vault which is terminated at a level change with a lunette painting of the Trexler Game Preserve by Brandywine River School artist George Harding. The stair opens onto a two-story high lobby dominated by massive square section piers that flair into capitals, carrying the beams and girders of the steel frame. Those are given classical profiles, and early photographs show, were accented with geometric, Lombardic Romanesque zig-zag ornament. To the left, or west side, a separate portion of the lobby was elevated a few steps, providing headroom for the shops down below. That zone was lighted by the arched headed windows of the 6th Street facade, and was ornamented by two additional murals by Harding. They were removed when the raised portion of the lobby was partitioned off to create a small bar.

To the rear of the lobby is the entrance to the ballroom/dining room, which was, and for that matter still is, one of the most impressive rooms in the region. It opens into a monumental, story-high vestibule which is dominated by the same square section piers capped with cubic capitals and carrying elaborately decorative beams and girders. Here the original paint scheme survives intact, as do the wrought iron Spanish style sconces. A massive girder, given shape by wind bracing steel forms the main transition to the rear single story of the dining room/ballroom. That room is rectangular in shape, and focusses on a stage at the far end. The room is given shape by an angled cornice, accented with medievalizing rondels that form the transition to the flat ceiling. Crystal chandeliers, regularly spaced in the center of the ceiling, add the requisite glitter to the room. Large round-headed windows, with iron sash, light the room.

The upper stories are reserved for private guest chambers, which open off the double loaded corridor. Trim is conventional, with door frames and panelled doors recalling the Colonial Revival of the period. The top story was converted in the past few years to a roof-top, multi-purpose room that opens out onto the roof deck and shows most of the cliches of 1960s design.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1926-1927 **Builder/Architect** Ritter & Shay, architects;  
Roberts & Roller, builders

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Americus Hotel marked the coming of age of Allentown's central business district, with the addition of a significant architectural work by Ritter and Shay, the major 1920s architects of Eastern Pennsylvania. That building is important as a landmark on Hamilton Street, Allentown's principal commercial avenue, but also celebrated the city's growth to the 100,000 level in population, making it the fifth largest city in the state, behind Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Erie and Reading. Those themes are evident in the styling of the building, which took Italo/Iberian sources to link the hotel to the discovery of North America by Amerigo Vespucci (hence the hotel's name). Moreover, the location of the Americus Hotel has significance as well, for the site had been occupied by a hotel for nearly one hundred and fifty years, reaching back to the origins of the community, even before its incorporation. Finally, the Americus Hotel represented the "boosterism" of its developer, the past president of the city's Chamber of Commerce and local merchant, Albert D. Gomery, who had long been associated with projects emphasizing the importance of his city.

The hotel, as architecture, joins a group of imposing metropolitan scale landmarks designed by Philadelphians Ritter and Shay. They had gained reknown in Philadelphia by merging the verticality of the Sullivanesque skyscraper with detail derived from historical styles. They were also innovators in the creation of the form of the modern urban building, formulating the idea of first floor commercial use, below the prime tenant, as in the case of the Market Street National Bank, which in turn provided the model for Howe and Lescaze's PSFS. That form was developed in Allentown's Americus Hotel, with a ring of shops on the street level surmounted by the public rooms of the hotel, which in turn were surmounted by the guest rooms, in an almost exact analogue to the office tower. The architects' interest in monumental and memorable urban form is clearly evident as well, for the view from the street suggests a cubic mass, while the reality is that above the exchange floor the hotel took an L-shaped plan to provide maximum light and air to the guest rooms. Last, but not least, the hotel is a sophisticated formal scheme that shows the hallmarks of modern urban style with the contemporary verticality of contemporary tall buildings, capped by a set back top, in a style that makes the symbolic intention of its owner evident.

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The plan is similarly involved and sophisticated. The lobby is placed at a mid-level in height, at the core of the building, surrounded by the shops of the street facade. Separate spaces -- lounges that would become bars with the ending of Prohibition -- were located half a flight up (on top of the shops), while the grill was half a flight down, with access from the street, thereby serving hotel guests and businessmen alike. The free flow of space from lobby to lounges and restaurant, and the interconnection to the vestibule and ballroom beyond, all opening from the lobby make it clear that Ritter and Shay had absorbed the spatial implications of Midwesterner Frank Lloyd Wright, but also of William Price (in whose Rose Valley community Shay lived).

Overlaying the clearly modern concerns of form and plan is the stylistic vocabulary selected for the building. The Allentown issue of The Magazine of Finance and Commerce (September 1928, Vol. XXXII:3) makes it evident that the hotel owners intended to celebrate the growth of their city, and to link that growth to the United States Sesquicentennial which was celebrated the year the hotel was begun. To that end, stylistic motifs associated with the Spanish backers of Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci were incorporated into the exterior and the interior. That was further emphasized in a series of important murals of Spanish life, painted by Brandywine River School artist George Harding. Harding had assisted N.C. Wyeth in the decoration of the Traymore and Marlborough-Blenheim Hotels in Atlantic City (both demolished) and had achieved a national reputation, painting murals as far west as Peoria, Illinois. During World War I, he interrupted his decorative career to become the battle painter for the War Department, continuing a line of activity reaching back to the Peale family in the 18th century. Harding was without exception the principal decorative painter of his day in the Philadelphia region.

If the hotel is important as a largely intact design by a regionally significant architect that celebrates its time, it is also an important celebration of its city and of its builder, Albert D. Gomery. The Morning Call, Allentown's newspaper, noted that connection in its multi-page spread celebrating the opening of the hotel. In a piece entitled "History of Old American Hotel Goes Back a Century and More," it described the earlier hostelries of the site, reaching back to Abraham Gangeware's late 18th century establishment. In the 1830s the hotel was owned by Charles Seagraves, who not coincidentally operated the stage line from Philadelphia to

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Allentown, which terminated at his hotel. Its location was of course prime, being a block from the town center, four blocks from the river, and by the 1860s, central between the railroad stations and the public square. Thus few locations have greater importance in Allentown history. With the immediately adjacent Zollinger Store and the Colonial Theater, the Americus Hotel capped the development of Hamilton Street and commemorates the vision of Albert Gomery. It was Gomery after all who instead of finding local architects, builders and artists, went to the metropolitan center of Philadelphia for architects Ritter and Shay, builders Roberts and Roller, and artist George Harding, and in the process avoided the conventional trap of parochialism in a local landmark. Instead, he created what he intended to create -- a nationally important hotel in a city coming of age. As a record of its era, by the principal architects of its day, in a style that celebrates the American experience, for Allentown's principal booster, Albert Gomery, the Americus Hotel deserves to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide, Volume XLI, #26, 30 June 1926

John Harbeson, "Howell Lewis Shay," Baldwin Memorial Archive, American Institute of Architects

The Year Book of the 29th Annual Architectural Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1926,  
T-Square Club

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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Americus Hotel

Allentown, PA

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ALL that certain hotel and parcel of land situated on the Northeast corner of Sixth and Hamilton Streets, in the City of Allentown aforesaid, and described as follows, to wit:

BEGINNING at a point at the Northeast corner of Sixth and Hamilton Streets, and extending thence along the North side of Hamilton Street eastward 91.02 feet, more or less, to property late of Gerhard C. Aschbach;

THENCE along the same Northwardly at right angles with Hamilton Street 170.67 feet;

THENCE eastward, in a line at right angles with said last mentioned line 11.08 feet, more or less, to property late of Gerhard C. Aschbach;

THENCE North along the same 58.76 feet to the South side of Court Street;

THENCE West along the same 101.68 feet to a point on the East side of Sixth Street;

THENCE South along the same 229.47 feet to the place of beginning; and

BEING the same premises conveyed to the Grantor herein by deed of Lehigh Valley Trust Company, et al, dated June 30, 1944, and recorded in Lehigh County Deed Book 640, page 456.

TOGETHER with and subject to all easements, covenants, conditions, reservations, exceptions and appurtenances as the same are contained in the chain of title.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

The Morning Call, 13 September, 1927, pp. 18-25, "Americus Hotel one of the Most Beautiful in America"  
Magazine of Finance and Commerce, Vol. XXXII:3 (September 1928), pp. 14, 23  
(continued)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Allentown East Quad

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	8	4	6	0	2	4	0	4	4	9	4	5	7	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

see attached

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Lehigh code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title George E. Thomas, Ph.D.

organization Clio Group, Inc.

date May 30, 1984

street & number 3961 Baltimore Avenue

telephone (215) 386-6276

city or town Philadelphia

state PA

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer

title

date 7/12/84

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

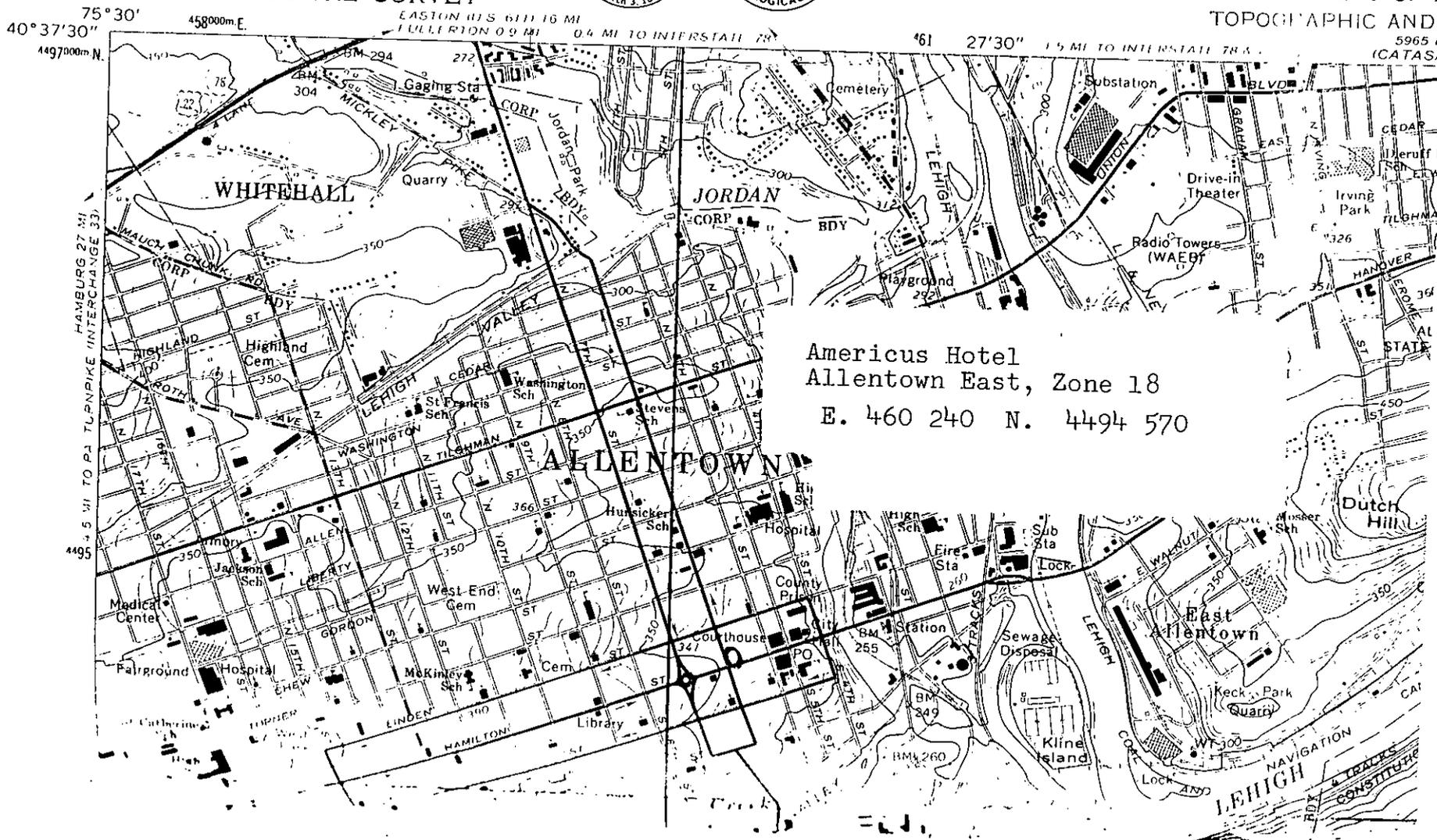
Chief of Registration

5865 II NE  
(CEMENTON)

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS  
TOPOGRAPHIC AND GEOGRAPHIC  
5965 II  
CATASAUQUUS



Americus Hotel  
Allentown East, Zone 18  
E. 460 240 N. 4494 570